

The Parent's Role in The College Admission Process

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The process of applying to college has more complex layers than it did when the parents of today applied to college. It can be difficult for parents to know [how to help](#), where to step in and when to back off. Here are some guidelines:

Parent Do's:

- **Support Independent Thinking.** This is the first major decision a student will make and they may not know how to research and evaluate a college for fit at the outset. Let them form and grapple with their own opinions before jumping in to share your own perspectives.
- **Encourage Free Time.** Students need time to just be—to relax and socialize. Many are managing packed schedules and getting little sleep. Everything they do doesn't have to relate to college admission.



Parents can help students maintain balance through the colleges admissions process.

- **Help students protect their privacy.** SAT scores, grades and college plans become a major topic by junior year and students share this information too freely with their peers, adding to the competitive atmosphere. Help students limit the information they share and protect them by not revealing it to well-meaning relatives and neighbors who might inquire. John, a recent college graduate, recalls applying early decision to a competitive college and how it felt to get deferred. "I stayed home from school the day after the decisions came out because I couldn't face everyone asking me if I got in," said John. "I regretted having told everyone I was applying early."
- **Manage the administrative tasks.** Parents can be invaluable in helping students register for tests, join the college mailing list, schedule visits and interviews, and track application deadlines.

“We would create a to-do list together and then plan when to complete the tasks such as booking the visits online tonight and scheduling flights on Tuesday,” said Amy, a veteran parent going through the admissions process for the second time. “Creating a folder for each school helped my daughter stay organized—after a visit all the material went to one place.”

- **Insist on Integrity.** Honor early decision agreements, be honest with athletic coaches about actual interest in their program, and be sure the application represents the student’s actual work and accomplishments.

- **Manage your own anxiety and disappointment.** If your child is not admitted to a favored college be there to support and reassure them and hide any personal disappointment you might feel on their behalf. Send the message that there are many good fit colleges and that disappointment is an inevitable part of the process.

- **Communicate Financial Parameters.** If there is a limited budget for college or the need for students to take loans, communicate this at the outset so students can choose affordable options and have a clear understanding of how loans will affect their future lifestyle. One mother helped her daughter see what it would mean to take out \$15,000 in loans per year, a total of \$60,000 over four years. Together, they calculated the interest rate and determined her monthly payments and how old she would be by the time she finished paying off the loan. After sleeping on it, the student decided to attend a less expensive college where she could graduate debt free.



Always let students open their own mail—especially the acceptance letter, the best part of the admissions process.

Steps to Avoid

- **Misusing pronouns: “Our” versus “You.”** While the college admission decision is a family decision, the experience is the student’s alone, so try not to refer to “our” applications but rather

“your” application (or visits, interviews and the like), allowing the student to take ownership of the experience.

- **Writing application essays.** When parents write or edit their child’s writing it sends a message that the student’s ideas are not good enough. With too much feedback, the student’s voice gets lost. It is fine to make suggestions or proof a final essay. “While the essay is an important part of the application, it is not the make or break factor in most cases,” said Jon Korhonen, associate director of admissions at Boston University. “It is, however, an important aspect of a file because we get a chance to hear from the applicant directly beyond the numbers, grades, courses, and voices of the guidance counselor and teachers. We want to hear the student’s voice, their story, and not one that has been edited to such a degree that it has lost its authenticity. Over the years, Jon has read a few essays that he questions if they actually came from a 17-year-old. “Admissions counselors will know what to expect from a writer, and we’re better at spotting unauthentic pieces of writing than most parents will give us credit for!”

- **Reading your child’s mail.** When the decision comes in the mail or via email, save it for your child to open no matter how curious you are. “If parents read your acceptance letter it turns something that’s supposed to be a sign of your independence and an accomplishment of yours into their accomplishment instead,” said Leo Shaw, a Bowdoin College student from Manhattan Beach, CA.

- **Taking college admissions advice from friends.** Well-meaning friends do not likely know what your child’s academic profile actually is, nor are they likely to be experts on colleges so keep their opinions in perspective.

- **Relying on your own college experience.** Things have changed; schools have changed—so be open.